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SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: NEW ELECTORAL COMMISSION TO BE HEADED BY
FORMER FM BAKAYOKO

REF: ABIDJAN 77

¶1. (U) Summary: A slightly revised Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) was sworn-in by the President of the Constitutional Court on February 25, with former Foreign Minister Youssouf Bakayoko as its new president. The opposition has reportedly called a halt to further demonstrations and is finalizing its participation in the reshuffled government announced on February 23. Completing the electoral list will be the CEI's first and most important task. End Summary

ELECTORAL COMMISSION RECONSTITUTED

¶2. (SBU) Speculation about who would head the new electoral commission was rampant in the days leading up to the February 25 announcement, with many convinced that a Forces Nouvelles representative would prevail given the current enmity among the political parties. The selection of Youssouf Bakayoko, a long-time PDCI loyalist and Foreign Minister until February 12, was completely unexpected. Bakayoko is widely respected for his professionalism, a trait it is hoped he will bring to the CEI more visibly than his predecessor, Robert Mambe. Four new vice presidents were also announced: Eby Ndabia, a former prefect, will represent the FPI (presidential party); Jacob Anaky, brother of the MFA founder, will represent that small opposition party; Mamadou Coulibaly Gnenema, formerly the CEI treasurer, moves to being vice president for the Forces Nouvelles; and Amadou Soumahoro, the former Commerce Minister, will represent the RDR.

¶3. (SBU) The new leadership team was sworn-in the evening of Feb. 25 along with the twenty-five members of the CEI who were retained per the agreement brokered by Pres. Compaore during his most recent visit to Abidjan. (ref A) The oath was delivered by Constitutional Court president Yapo Germain Yanon, a symbolically important choice made by the government to reinforce the authority of this court over the commission. The commission will resume work the week of March 1 and is expected to announce that challenges to the provisional electoral list will be accepted for an additional three week period. Individuals whose names have not been "validated" will also have an additional three weeks to come forward with proof of citizenship.

NEW GOVERNMENT STILL NOT COMPLETE

¶4. (U) According to local media, the opposition continues talks with Prime Minister Soro about their participation in the new government, which was formed on February 24 with eleven slots reserved for the opposition, but no ministers actually named (reftel). However, a spokesman for the opposition coalition told the press that they would stop calling on their supporters to conduct demonstrations to protest President Gbagbo's February 12 dissolution of the government. The PDCI, RDR, and UDPICI should announce their representatives in the new government by Monday.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: The election of Bakayoko, a well-regarded career diplomat (former Ambassador to Germany and Switzerland), sends a positive signal that, while party affiliations are important, ability also played a crucial role in the selection of the new CEI president. Embassy had a very productive and friendly relationship with him in his role as Foreign Minister and expects to continue to have good access to him. His selection, which we understand Pres. Gbagbo had to agree to, should also reassure the opposition that the presidency can support a CEI president from another party, as long as he operates in a professional, non-partisan manner. The reconstitution of the CEI should enable the electoral process to regain the momentum it has lost since the beginning of the year. Their first task will be to complete work on the preliminary electoral list and publish a final list within a reasonable timeframe. If the CEI succeeds in doing this, their

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credibility will increase, as will hope that an election this year may truly be possible.

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